

# Whately on Explanation, etc.

Version 2.2

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Richard Whately (1787-1863) Was an English logician and theological writer. He lectured on various subjects at Oxford in the 1820's including Political Economy or, as we would now say, Economics. He became (Anglican) archbishop of Dublin in 1831.

## Encyclopædia<sup>1</sup>

[Whately's] treatise on *Logic* (1826) ... gave a great impetus to the study of logic throughout Great Britain. ... A similar treatise on *Rhetoric* ... appeared in 1828. ... At a later [than 1837] period he also wrote ... *Easy Lessons on Reasoning*, on *Morals*, on *Mind*, and on the *British Constitution*. ... Whately's qualities are exhibited at their best in his *Logic*, which is, as it were, the quintessence of the views which he afterwards applied to different subjects. He wrote nothing better than the luminous Appendix to the work on *Ambiguous Terms*.

Whately's text book, *Elements of Logic*, was widely used, and went through numerous edition.

Here is a simple observation that is invaluable in distinguishing arguments from explanations:

## Whately, *Easy Lessons*<sup>2</sup>

It is to be observed, that the word "why" has three different senses: from what cause? by what proofs? for what purpose?

And here is the same theme developed more "luminously"<sup>3</sup>:

## Whately, *Logic*

*Reason* is also employed to signify the *Premiss* or *Premises* of an argument; especially the minor *Premiss*; and it is from *Reason* in this sense that the word "Reasoning" is derived.

It is also very frequently used to signify a *Cause*; as when we say, in popular language, that the "Reason of an eclipse of the sun is, that the moon is interposed between it and the earth." This should strictly be called the cause. On the other hand, "Because" (i.e. by Cause) is used to introduce either the Physi-

cal Cause or the Logical Proof: and "Therefore," "Hence," "Since," "Follow," "Consequence," and many other kindred words, have a corresponding ambiguity: e.g.

"the ground is wet, *because* it has rained;" or

"it has rained, and *hence* the ground is wet;"

this is the assignment of the *Cause*; again,

"it has rained, *because* the ground is wet;"

"the ground is wet, and *therefore* it has rained;"

this is assigning the logical *proof*; the wetness of the ground is the cause, not of the rain having fallen, but of *our knowing* that it has fallen. And this probably it is that has led to the ambiguous use in all languages of almost all the words relating to these two points. It is an ambiguity which has produced incalculable confusion of thought, and from which it is the harder to escape, on account of its extending to those very forms of expression which are introduced in order to clear it up.

What adds to the confusion is, that the *Cause* is often employed as a *Proof* of the effect: as when we infer, from a great fall of rain, that there is, or will be, a flood; which is at once the physical effect and the logical conclusion. The case is just reversed, when from a flood we infer that rain has fallen.

The more attention any one bestows on this ambiguity, the more extensive and important its results will appear.

Whately was always eager to *apply* his logical methods to the subjects in which he was interested (chiefly theology and political economy.) To assist in the application of logical theory to practice he included the following in his logic book. It is the earliest example of argument



1. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1941 edition.

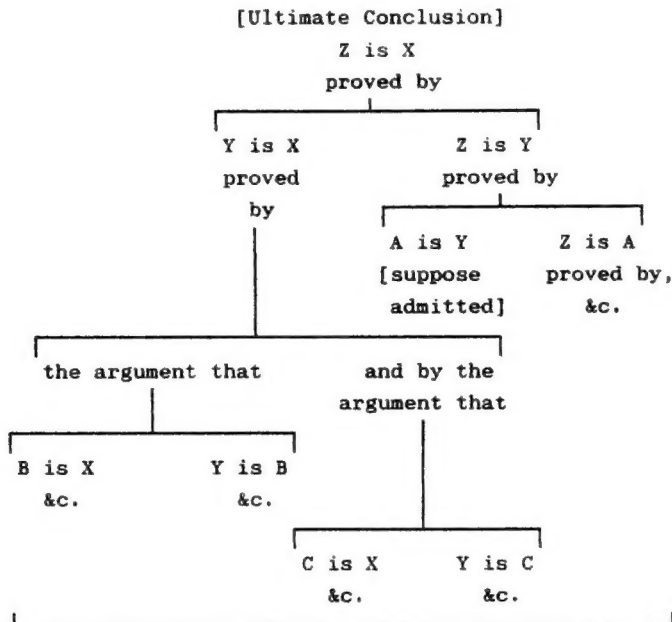
2. *Easy Lessons on Reasoning* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1872). p. 138.

3. Whately, Richard. *Elements of Logic*. Boston: James Munroe, 1845. First published in 1826. Some textual correction and emphasis added.

diagramming known to the *LCR*.<sup>4</sup> Notice that he puts the conclusion at the top.

### Whately, *Logic*

Many students probably will find it a very clear and convenient mode of exhibiting the logical analysis of a course of argument, to draw it out in the form of a Tree, or logical Division; thus,



In the nineteenth century Whately's name became associated in the public's mind with close observance of logical rules. Here is a sign of that in some verses (in the *Bab Ballads*) by W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911), the lyrics half of Gilbert and Sullivan, which probably date from the 1860's.

W. S. Gilbert (c.1860)

SIR MACKLIN

Of all the youths I ever saw  
None were so wicked, vain or silly,  
So lost to shame and Sabbath law,  
As worldly Tom, and Bob and Billy.



For every Sabbath day they walked  
(Such was their gay and thoughtless natur')  
In parks or gardens, where they talked  
From three to six, or even later.

Sir Macklin was a priest severe  
In conduct and in conversation,  
It did a sinner good to hear  
Him deal in ratiocination.

He could in every action show  
Some sin, and nobody could doubt him.  
He argued high, he argued low,  
He also argued round about him.

He wept to think each thoughtless youth  
Contained of wickedness a skinful,  
And burnt to teach the awful truth,  
That walking out on Sunday's sinful.

"Oh, youths," said he, "I grieve to find  
The course of life you've been and hit on—  
Sit down," said he, "and never mind  
The pennies for the chairs you sit on."

"My opening head is 'Kensington,'  
How walking there the sinner hardens;  
Which when I have enlarged upon,  
I go to 'Secondly'—its Gardens.

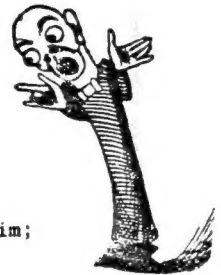
"My 'Thirdly' comprehendeth 'Hyde,'  
Of Secrecy the guilt and shameses;  
My 'Fourthly'—'Park'—its verdure wide—  
My 'Fifthly' comprehends 'St. James's'.

"That matter settled I shall reach  
The 'Sixthly' in my solemn tether,  
And show that what is true of each,  
Is also true of all, together.

"Then I shall demonstrate to you,  
According to the rules of *Whately*,  
That what is true of all, is true  
Of each, considered separately."

In lavish streams his accents flow,  
Tom, Bob and Billy dare not flout him;  
He argued high, he argued low,  
He also argued round about him.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "you loathe your ways,  
Repentance on your souls is dawning,  
In agony your hands you raise."  
(And so they did, for they were yawning.)



4. *Ibid.*, p. 342 (From Appendix III, *The Praxis of Logical Analysis*). Whately gives credit for diagramming to an earlier logic book by someone named Hinds, but the *LCR* has not been able to locate a copy.